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S K E T C H
O F
A S P E E C H

DELIVERED AT THE
WESTMINSTER FORUM,
ON THE
9th, 16th, 23d, and 30th DECEMBER 1794,

ON THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

“ WHICH HAVE PROVED THEMSELVES THE TRUE FRIENDS
“ OF THEIR KING AND COUNTRY, THOSE PERSONS WHO
“ HAVE ENDEAVOURED TO PROCURE A CONSTITUTIONAL
“ REFORM IN PARLIAMENT, OR THOSE WHO HAVE OP-
“ POSED THAT MEASURE AS ILL-TIMED AND DANGEROUS?”

By JOHN GALE JONES.

“ If to alleviate the sufferings of Mankind and promote a Reformation of Abuses ; to deliberate upon Public Measures and seek Redress of Grievances ; to sooth the Sigh of solitary Wretchedness and speak Comfort to the drooping Heart ; if these be Treason and Sedition, then am I content to suffer the Imputation, then may the Corresponding Society at once plead *Guilty* to the Charge ; since with these attendant circumstances, *Libel* has been their Morning's Theme, *Sedition* their Evening's Employment, and *Treason* their Order of the Day!”

Vide Speech.

L O N D O N :

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M,DCC,XCV.

[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]



INTRODUCTION.

A Multiplicity of causes with which it would be useless and impertinent to trouble the Public, has prevented an earlier appearance of the following Speech. From the favourable reception, however, of a recent attempt, the Author is encouraged to submit it even thus late, to the critical inspection of an impartial Public. He feels it necessary, for the information of those who did not, and for the satisfaction of those who did, attend the Westminster Forum, to observe, that as much as could well be recollected of the Four Evenings Discussions, the greater part of which, as may be readily perceived, was extemporaneous, is here collected and consolidated .

consolidated into one; but that a few passages have also been inserted, which although they were not delivered at that place, yet being adapted to the subject, may serve, perhaps, in some small degree, to add strength and connexion to the whole.



Hampstead-Road,

17th June 1795.

QUESTION.

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“ WHICH HAVE PROVED THEMSELVES THE TRUE
“ FRIENDS OF THEIR KING AND COUNTRY,
“ THOSE PERSONS WHO HAVE ENDEAVOURED TO
“ PROCURE A CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN
“ PARLIAMENT, OR THOSE WHO HAVE OPPOSED
“ THAT MEASURE AS ILL-TIMED AND DANGE-
“ ROUS?”

IN speaking to the present question, Sir, I feel no inconsiderable share of anxiety, both from the consideration of its manifest importance, and from a consciousness of my own inability; and I ought, perhaps, upon this occasion, rather to remain a silent auditor than obtrude myself upon your notice, thus inexperienced and unprepared. Small, however, as may be my pretensions, and insufficient as are my claims upon the attention of this intelligent assembly, I am encouraged to

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hope,

hope, that the cause for which I profess myself an humble advocate, while it affords an excuse for my temerity, will shield me from malevolence or reproof.

I assure you, Sir, that I felt a degree of impatience, amounting almost to vexation, when I perceived the continued unanimity with which this discussion at first proceeded, and observed the regular succession of speakers, all of whom maintained precisely the same opinion, without experiencing any opposition; and I began to conclude what I have long since suspected, either that their arguments were unanswerable, or that Mr. Burke's assertion was certainly true, when he declared that the "age of chivalry was gone;" a gentleman has, however, kindly relieved my anxiety, and removed my apprehensions, by taking upon himself the ungracious task of opposition, and like the knight of the rueful countenance, has boldly sallied forth to encounter the giant and destroy, as he terms it, the hydra-headed monster of Reform.

As this gentleman has been pleased to advance some very extraordinary propositions, and seems to consider himself as a very formidable assailant, I am, for once, induced, notwithstanding his superior

superior prowess, to enter the lists and break a lance with this champion of aristocracy: in so doing I shall not, to follow the gentleman's example, seek to perplex and obscure the subject, by adopting quaint witticisms or quoting Latin authorities, but shall think myself bound to treat it with that serious and unaffected solemnity which its acknowledged importance demands.

With that singular vivacity which usually accompanies his observations, he sat out with declaring himself a "high-flying aristocrat"; how far it was prudent or proper for him to give himself a name, of which I assure him, *I* am not ambitious, it may remain for this assembly to determine; but if, in the course of this evening's discussion, I had ventured to assume the party appellation of a *democrat*, I believe, I should have scarcely failed to receive, what I should certainly have deserved, a public mark of reprobation. I would, however, caution the gentleman, to beware in the pursuit of his "high-flown honours" lest he meet with the untimely fate of Icarus, or like Phaëton find his fall the more disastrous in proportion to the height to which his expectations have soared!

The gentleman has roundly and unequivocally asserted, that Corruption is a necessary ingredient

in the British Constitution; that it is the oil which makes the wheels of government run smoothly, and that it is an useful and an expedient alloy. I confess, Sir, that I heard him with considerable apprehension and surprise; for although I knew his sentiments to be such as are peculiarly favourable to the present administration, I could not avoid suspecting that the active zeal of some hired agent, might induce him to treasure this extraordinary assertion in his memory, and transmit it to his honourable employers; the gentleman might thereby have justly incurred the hazard of being prosecuted for a libel; since is it not a foul and malicious libel to declare that the British constitution exists only by corruption, and that to wage war with iniquity is to undermine its foundation! But it would seem that the advocates of administration may assert with impunity, what from its opponents would not fail of being construed into a crime of the most serious nature, and entail upon its guilty authors imprisonment or transportation!

He thinks also, that man, being the slave of passion, is virtuous only from controul; and thence deduces what he deems an unanswerable argument against a reform. I believe, Sir, the converse of this proposition to be true, and that mankind

mankind is vicious only from fear or from necessity ; without entering, however, into an examination of this curious remark, which is too absurd to deserve a serious refutation, I beg leave to assure the gentleman that it is neither prudent nor reasonable to expect that, at the present improved and enlightened period, men will be governed by the same means which were exercised during an age of unlettered barbarity. Government, indeed, may be truly said to have experienced a political climax. Men first yielded implicit obedience from *ignorance* : afterwards, and even *now*, perhaps, *influence* is the prevailing motive ; but the time, if not already arrived, is rapidly approaching, when mankind to be governed to any effectual purpose must submit to *principle*, and to *principle only*!

The gentleman has thought proper, Sir, to throw out some insinuations on the character and conduct of a certain popular society ; feeling as I do for its interest and for the object which it steadily pursues, I have no hesitation in thus publicly declaring that I am neither afraid nor ashamed to avow myself a member of the London Corresponding Society ; a society, which notwithstanding the artful misrepresentations of calumny and falsehood, I aver to be respectable from its
zeal,

zeal, its perseverance, its fortitude, and its sincerity, which wants neither virtue nor abilities to direct it, and which unlike many public men and most public measures, seeks the benefit of the whole community, not the aggrandisement of particular individuals, and remains firm and consistent to the purpose of its original institution!

If to alleviate the sufferings of mankind and promote a reformation of abuses; to deliberate upon public measures and seek redress of grievances; to soothe the sigh of solitary wretchedness, and speak comfort to the drooping heart; if these be treason and sedition, then am I content to suffer the imputation, and to yield myself a willing victim; then may the Corresponding Society at once plead guilty to the charge, since with these attendant circumstances *libel* has been their morning's theme, *sedition* their evening's employment, and *treason* their order of the day!

In the most unqualified manner he has stated that their number, far from being considerable, was so diminutively small, that a president and two secretaries made up the whole amount of a meeting; that they busied themselves in voting addresses and resolutions of thanks to each other; and

and that their proceedings were so truly insignificant and contemptible, that they might more aptly be styled the sports of children than the efforts of men solicitous to procure a Reform.

How the gentleman came by this curious intelligence, I have neither curiosity to ask nor inclination to enquire; perhaps upon this as upon some late occasions, those who were employed for that purpose made it their business to misrepresent and deceive, and as it suited their own particular interests found it necessary sometimes to magnify and sometimes to diminish the terror of their discoveries; but for that gentleman's immediate information, I shall beg leave to state, that were I to compute the actual and effective number of the members of the political societies instituted for obtaining a parliamentary reform, *forty thousand* would, I believe, be considerably below the true amount.

Admitting, however, his statement to be just and his assertions true; why then, I ask, were all those formidable preparations made against supposed plots and imaginary conspiracies? Why was the whole kingdom thrown into alarm and confusion, the Militia called out, the Habeas Corpus Act *suddenly* suspended, and the artillery
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of the Tower pointed at the loyal and defenceless inhabitants of the City of London? Surely it was not necessary that such tremendous proceedings should be adopted to spoil the sports of children; unless we admit with an honourable Member of the House of Commons, that the impossibility of discovering a particular circumstance is an additional proof of its existence, and that the smaller the mischief, the greater should be the means of prevention!

But it is repeatedly urged even by those who formerly upheld it as an essential and necessary measure, that this is not the time for a Reform, and for the following reasons, "we are engaged in a war which requires the utmost power and energy—the public mind is strongly agitated, and the nation divided." This comes with a very ill grace from those who at a time equally unfavourable and with language much more severe, attacked the abuses of administration, and incessantly reiterated the cry of Reform. At the close of the American war, when shame and disappointment had overwhelmed the nation, and discontent was at an alarming height; when public credit had experienced a severe and almost fatal shock, and the country was declared to be upon the brink of ruin, Associations were
formed

formed and meetings held in every part of the metropolis, at the Thatched House Tavern, in Westminster, and in the Guildhall of London. Resolutions of a very strong and pointed nature were passed with the sanction and under the immediate influence of Mr. Pitt and the Duke of Richmond, who having attained the *real* object *they* had in view, have since thought proper to persecute and punish with unrelenting severity the Profelytes they have gained, and the opinions which they *themselves* had first set afloat! But if the public mind be agitated, to whom are we to attribute the fermentation, or how shall we apply a suitable remedy? What so likely to conciliate affection and procure unanimity as a compliance with the popular wish, and an immediate redress of grievances? It is vain to expect energy from a desponding nation, or to call forth the active exertions of a degraded people. They may enroll themselves, indeed, not from choice, but from imperious necessity, and prefer the hope of sudden death to a life of servitude and oppression; but will men be readily persuaded to put on the armour of patriotism, and take the field with courage and with confidence, when they know that they left behind them their constitution violated, their liberties invaded, and their laws suspended! Lamentable, indeed, must be the situation of that

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country,

country, whose interests are thus neglected, and whose privileges are thus destroyed; indifference succeeds disgust; a sullen apathy takes place of keen resentment; abject slavery, or open rebellion becomes the only remaining alternative, and in such a situation it soon becomes a matter of very little consequence who is their minister or who their king!

But we are insultingly asked, "who are the persons most loud in the cry of Reformation, and most solicitous for the removal of abuse?" and the answer is always ready, "they are men of depraved characters and desperate fortunes, who from indolence or dissipation having lost all, expect to gain something; and being entirely destitute, hope to profit by a sudden change." Were these arguments as true as they are false,—still should I continue to be a strenuous advocate for a Parliamentary Reform, and redouble my efforts for the accomplishment of so desirable and so necessary a purpose. Independently of its removing the veil, under which men of this description may be supposed to conceal their latent designs, by taking away all plausible pretext for their associating together, that those who are destitute should desire a competency, is neither strange nor unreasonable; and if the majority of
a nation

a nation be poor, it is high time its government should be altered. I confess, however, that I am not so apprehensive of my own species, as to believe that an attempt to meliorate and improve its condition, would be productive only of anarchy and confusion, or that to restore to a considerable portion of mankind, its natural rights, should render it the perpetrator of wrongs. But it is not true that men of lost characters and ruined fortunes are the only advocates of Parliamentary Reform. It is persons who *have* property, who are independent, who possess *real* respectability that are, as indeed they ought to be, the most strenuous and the most sincere in their pursuit of a measure, which if obtained, would effectually preserve them, as well from the shameless profusion of a corrupt and profligate administration, as from the licentious and ungoverned frenzy of a popular insurrection.

It is of little consequence to me, whether my property be resumed by a populace or seized by the rapacity of a minister; whether it be lost in a public commotion, or divided in a scramble among placemen and pensioners; the cause might be different, but the effect would be eventually the same; I should reflect, however, that the greater number had undoubtedly the greater

right, and should derive at least this consolation, that it would be circulated among the *many* instead of being monopolized by a *few*!

Whenever the subject is discussed, an attempt is constantly made to influence the passions, and pervert the understanding, by recurring to circumstances which possess not the most remote connexion: the massacres of Paris afford a fruitful source to supply the deficiency of argument, and the friends of Reform are branded with the opprobrious design of wishing to engraft the French Guillotine on the English Constitution. The gentleman has provoked a discussion, into which I am as unwilling as unable perhaps to enter; were the predisposing causes and attendant circumstances of these massacres, to be minutely investigated and accurately detailed, I believe it would be found, that to the stubborn opposition to a timely Reform, and to a perseverance in a system of profligacy and corruption; to the coalition of Courts, and to the infamous manifestoes of that military Bobadil, the Duke of Brunswick, may we justly attribute those awful and sanguinary transactions.

But why so perpetually recur to the affairs of France, or attempt to prove that a Reform in
the

the English Parliament, would necessarily produce those dreadful consequences, which are said to have followed its introduction into that distracted country? Is it not strange that gentlemen, while they take a peculiar pleasure in applauding and defending the old Government of France, should so continually calumniate and libel the British Constitution? To produce similar effects, it must first be prov'd that similar causes exist, and will any one have the temerity to assert, that the present situation of England resembles the old arbitrary despotism of France? Surely not! France exhibited a national bankruptcy, an enormous accumulation of unmerited places and pensions, a haughty and overbearing aristocracy, and a state of tyranny, which was no longer endurable. It was because the Monarch was deaf to the calls of justice, and would *not* listen to Reform till *too late*, that those consequences ensued so instructive to others, but so fatal to himself! Had he yielded a timely attention to the voice of an injured nation, and complied with the anxious wishes of an oppressed people; had he commenced a salutary and effectual Reformation, he might still have continued in the secure possession of his original power and authority, and have received all that veneration and esteem, which an honourable
mind

mind can require, or a generous nation bestow!

For it is not among the least of the causes which produced the late Revolution in France, that the whole energy of literature and philosophy was vigorously exerted against a corrupt and malignant system, and the pure rays of the sun of reason were incessantly darted through the fombrous and gloomy recesses of tyranny and superstition. The contest was severe, but the triumph has been complete. The unalienable rights of human nature were boldly avowed and gallantly maintained; the cursed engines of oppression were destroyed, the mansions of despotism levelled with the dust; and the *blessed* tree of liberty springing from their mouldering ruins, amidst the loud hallelujahs of enraptured millions, reared high its lofty trunk, extended its colossal branches, and diffused its fragrance to the remotest corners of the globe, from the shores of America to the plains of Indostan!

It has been confidently asserted that a Reform is neither wanted nor desired, and that the public is contented that things should remain precisely as they are. Miserable infatuation! will you never acknowledge the voice of the people,
till

till it speak in too loud and angry a tone to be with safety resisted? *will you never believe that the storm is gathering, till you hear the loud thunder roll, and see the vivid lightning flash!* Behold! the starved manufacturer and the oppressed peasant—the barren soil and the deserted loom—the helpless widow's and the wretched orphan's tears—the groans of the sick and the anguish of the slaughtered: behold these, ye unfeeling advocates of the present system of corruption, and tell me, is not every wound an impressive tongue that sues for immediate peace, and every drop of blood a voice that calls aloud, Reform!

It is not within the crowded streets of a gay metropolis or the walls of an elegant theatre, the purlieus of St. James's or the precincts of a court, that we are enabled to form a just estimate of the comparative happiness or misery of mankind. Alas! there is a silent sum of solitary wretchedness which shrinks from public enquiry, and avoids the unwelcome researches of impertinent curiosity. Already do we see even among those who are the last to feel its effects, the dreadful consequences of a system of abuse and corruption; already has a species of narrow policy and penuriousness pervaded what are called the middling classes of society: munificence and hospitality
give

give place to cold calculations of prudence and self-interest; friendship is sacrificed to convenience; artificial splendor serves only as a veil to conceal the certainty of approaching ruin; pride and false delicacy forbid, what necessity would urge; and if distress be often imperceptible, it is not because it is unfelt, but because it is not willingly acknowledged!

Introduced early into the world, and educated in what is termed an honourable and a liberal profession, how often have I heard the involuntary sigh, and witnessed the silent tear, stealing down the furrowed cheek of hoary-headed age! How often have I seen the emaciated frame of helpless infancy, and observed the worn-out mechanic stretched on the lonely bed of sickness! Frequently have I discovered that far the greater portion of the diseases, which afflict humanity, has been the result only of poverty and wretchedness; that the miserable sufferers wanted not restorative medicines, but *actual bread*; and while my heart has deplored their unhappy fate, and my hand vainly attempted to administer the necessary relief, how have I anxiously wished for the restoration of peace and tranquillity, and sighed for a *Parliamentary Reform*!

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To enter into a tedious detail of the present partial and decayed state of the representation of the people of Great Britain, and point out its numerous abuses, would only be to call the public attention to relations which have been often repeated, and to facts which have become almost disgusting from their notoriety. Yet, as in every collective assembly, there are to be found many, who, unwilling or unable to enquire for themselves, repose with perfect indifference, and with implicit confidence, upon the prevailing system, and treat every contrary assertion as false or unfounded; it may perhaps be necessary, to select a few striking examples, to prove as well the necessity as the expedience of a Parliamentary Reform. The following statement extracted from the Morning Chronicle, will shew the disproportion between five of the most populous cities and counties, and six boroughs, which elect an equal number of members.

Places	Electors	Members
London contains	7000 sents	4 to Parliament.
Westminster ———	10000 ———	2 ———
Middlesex ———	3500 ———	2 ———
Surry ———	4500 ———	2 ———
Southwark ———	2000 ———	2 ———

Total 27,000 Tot. 12

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Places

Places	Electors	Members
Newtown contains	1	sends 2 to Parliament.
Old Sarum ———	1	2 ———
Midhurst ———	1	2 ———
Castle Rising ———	2	2 ———
Marlborough ———	3	2 ———
Downton ———	4	2 ———
	Total 12	Total 12

In the above statement it will evidently appear, that in one case 27,000, and in the other 12 electors, return the same number of Members to Parliament, viz. 12. But in truth the House of Commons, the pretended representative of the people, does not represent the one hundredth part. The City of Bath alone contains 30,000 inhabitants, and the right of election is monopolized by about thirty-one persons. The City of Edinburgh contains 144,000, and the number of Electors is nineteen. The County of Yorkshire, which contains not far short of a million of souls, returns two County Members; so does the County of Rutland, which contains not a hundredth part of the number. The town of Old Sarum, (if it can be so called) which contains not three houses, send two Members, while the City of Manchester, containing 60,000 inhabitants, is not admitted to send any.

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With facts like these presenting themselves before us, how can any one have the temerity to defend so abominable a system, or dare to insult a British Assembly by declaring that corruption is necessary, and influence desirable. If it be true, that the British Government is compounded of King, Lords and Commons; that the collective energy of the whole depends upon the equal adjustment, and perfect coincidence of each; that neither should preponderate, but that it should form a complete triple balance; and if it can be proved, that the popular portion, which is the most essential and the most valuable, is violated and almost destroyed, shall we not be justified in believing those who loudly assert that *we have no Constitution*, and that the *House of Commons is not the representative of the people!*

What if at some subsequent period of national calamity and distress, when the pressing exigencies of the state may render it indispensably necessary to impose additional burthens, and recur to extraordinary measures; the principal manufacturing towns, such as Birmingham, Manchester, &c. should suddenly refuse to comply with the requisitions of Government, and resist a collection of the revenue? What if they should plead in justification of their refusal, that *they*

are not represented, and ought not, therefore, to be taxed? In such an alarming situation, however, we might lament the occasion, and tremble for the consequences, we should be compelled to acknowledge that we know of no law which could enforce compliance, nor are acquainted with any principle which could justify compulsion!

Is it not then, I ask every serious and reflecting person, of the most essential importance, by a speedy and radical Reform, to prevent the bare possibility of so dreadful a mischief, and endeavour to procure that affection and unanimity which can alone afford security and protection at this critical and awful moment? Are not those, indeed, friends of their King and well-wishers to their Country, who would consult their *true* interests and promote their *real* welfare, by pursuing with unremitted zeal and perseverance, a measure calculated at once to extinguish the flames of civil discord, and ensure universal tranquillity?

A gentleman * this evening addressed you in a speech which I confess, I think, did equal honour

* This was on the 3d Evening's Debate.

to his head and to his heart ; and which if it failed to excite that general attention which it certainly deserved, it must have been for this convincing reason, that no eloquence, however captivating, nor talents, however rare, will ever make a forcible or a lasting impression, if they do not come recommended and assisted by the powerful voice of Truth. He told us, that on a late occasion, when the sentiments of the people of England were generally and loudly called for, that a brave and loyal nation overflowed with expressions of gratitude and affection for their King and Constitution ; and he applied this as a powerful argument to shew that the public was strongly averse to a Reform. Why was this artful and insidious attempt made to influence our passions and mislead our judgment ? Are *Government* and *Abuse* always to be considered only as synonymous terms ? and does it inevitably follow, as a necessary conclusion, that to be a friend of Reform is to be disaffected and disloyal ? if so, I confess myself to have been guilty of a glaring impropriety, since I was one of those who were readily persuaded to subscribe to an address, and yet profess myself an advocate for a Reform.

But where is this boasted Constitution, of which we have lately heard so much, and discovered so little ;

little; which is so perpetually dinned in our ears, and held out as the envy and admiration of the world? if it be indeed so excellent, why are we thus deprived of its most essential benefits, and amused with an empty name? if it be so truly glorious, let us be dazzled with its superior lustre, not darkened by its sudden and total eclipse. It is a trite but just observation, that the recollection of past pleasure brings forth present pain; and I confess when I call to mind what the Constitution *was*, and compare it with what it *is*, I cannot but consider the unqualified panegyrics of those who profit by its corruption, and who are interested in its abuse, as a flagrant insult upon our understandings; and I am led to this simple yet serious question, Which ought to be considered as *Traitors* to their King and Country, those who are invading and destroying piece-meal its most valuable privileges, or those who have incessantly laboured to restore it to its original purity and splendor?

But he asks, "how are we to ascertain the general sentiment, and where shall we collect the public opinion?" to this I answer, any where, every where, *wherever you can find men*. We must except, it is true, a crowded drawing-room, the members within St. Stephen's chapel, and a meeting of Liverymen at Merchant Taylors-hall; because

because these mostly consist of persons who are immediately interested in the continuation of the present system, and from whom it would be vain and useless to expect a favourable answer : but wherever a casual and indiscriminate assembly of men of all professions and descriptions is convened, I am sure, he will find that nine-tenths are friendly to Reform. It is not a man's being possessed of a few acres or a few pounds more or less, or having a better or worse coat or no coat at all on his back, that should confer extraordinary privileges or unnatural exemptions. *Men not money*, the living countenance not the *dead effigy* are the objects of representation ; and I confess that I know of no rank or station so elevated as to preclude the strict performance of the duties of humanity, nor acknowledge any situation, however low or degraded, which should debar an individual from the full enjoyment of the unalienable and imprescriptible Rights of Man !

But we are confidently told, and gentlemen have undoubtedly assumed to themselves a considerable portion of credit for their *superior* discernment, that the friends of Reform had *other* designs and *other* views than those they openly professed : that Reform was a mere pretext and
that

that the final overthrow and total destruction of all regular and constituted authorities was the *real* and *only* plan which they had in contemplation. This is indeed a formidable accusation, but like most charges of this description it is equally unfounded and unsupported. Where are their proofs? where are their authentic documents? the societies have always openly avowed their principles and their opinions, and *two hundred thousand* printed copies will readily testify the publicity of their proceedings. If you will not believe them from their own declarations, what other mode of decision will you adopt to prove their sincerity, or who can pretend to dive into the inmost recesses of the human heart? It is said that at the moment of the apprehension of several of the leading members, the societies were just on the point of unmasking themselves, and proceeding to unjustifiable acts of violence and aggression, when government *bappily* interposed, and crushed them with its superior weight. Those who are acquainted with the subsequent conduct of the London Corresponding Society will know that this is false, for never at any time since its original institution, has it either deviated from its first principles, or forsaken its *real* object: alike indifferent to the frowns of adversity or to the threats of power, regardless of the machinations

thinations of calumny, and of the iron hand of persecution, it has still continued inflexible in the same steady path, and like a faithful sentinel has neither fled at the approach of danger, nor slumbered at its post !

At the time when many of its members were seized and imprisoned, conscious of its innocence and assured of the legality of its proceedings, it met in greater numbers and in greater force ; but though it might be naturally supposed, that its indignation would be excited and its feelings roused by the violent and illegal measures of administration ; its determinations were firm but peaceable—moderate yet impressive. As the gauntlet has been thrown, permit me for a moment, Sir, to take it up and accept the challenge, to call my evidence and leave it to this intelligent assembly to close the proceedings with a verdict of acquittal or condemnation ! I shall beg leave to state, as far as my memory will permit, the last resolutions which I acknowledge to have drawn up, and which were submitted to, and unanimously adopted by the London Corresponding Society.

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London

London Corresponding Society.

General Committee, June 5, 1794.

Resolved unanimously,

1st, That the London Corresponding Society was instituted *solely* for the purpose of obtaining universal suffrage, and annual parliaments, and has never asserted any principles which had not these for their basis, nor adopted any measures which have not been openly and publicly avowed.

2dly, That, fully convinced of the legality of its proceedings, and firm in its principles, it feels no inclination, at the present crisis, to retract any of its former assertions, nor depart from its original purpose.

3dly, That to wish for a Parliamentary Reform, is neither *illegal*, seditious, nor treasonable.

4thly, That the peaceful assembling of men, in a *Meeting or Convention* to deliberate upon public measures, and seek redress of grievances, is not yet declared by law to be *illegal*, seditious or treasonable.

5thly, That

5thly, That these two circumstances, taken apart, being innocent, their combination cannot infer guilt ; since the union of two proper and virtuous actions can never produce either an impropriety or a crime ; and that, therefore, as to wish for a Parliamentary Reform, and to assemble peaceably, are in themselves legal, so to meet in a Convention, and *there* wish for a Parliamentary Reform, must be perfectly and strictly legal.

6thly, If the foregoing propositions be just, it follows, that the imprisonment of any individual, ought not to affect the existence or the continuation of this society ; since as its object is legal, and its means honest, its best security while law is practised, and trial by Jury *yet* remains, is to resign itself peaceably to the decision of its country ; convinced that by such a conduct the ultimate event must be, to this Society a *Pillar of Glory*, to its enemies, a monument of *Shame* !

7thly, That it is not only the *Right*, but the *Duty* of every individual, in possession of his reason, to improve his faculties by investigation, and exercise his judgment on every subject, wherein he is essentially concerned ; and that he who contributes to the support of that form of

government under which he *consents* to live, ought to be well instructed in the precise nature of its privileges and obligations !

8thly, That to deprive men of the exercise and enjoyment of their faculties, is to take away the very foundation upon which all government stands ; for that which appeals not to reason, but to force ; which seeks, not to convince the judgment but coërce the will, is *not* government, but tyranny and oppression, or if a government, is one fitted, not for *Men*, but for *Brutes* !

9thly, That the apprehension and imprisonment of many of its most valuable and useful members, though in so much as it concerns themselves individually, it affords considerable regret, yet to the Society in particular, and to the public in general, ought rather to be a matter of satisfaction ; since while it proves that the enemies to peace and Reform, have no other weapons to oppose them than those of *Violence* and *Prosecution*, it will tend, should administration venture to bring them to an impartial trial, to promote effectually the cause in which it has embarked, and clear it from ill founded and undeserved imputations.

10thly, That,

10thly, That, therefore, so far from shrinking from observation, or courting obscurity, the members of this society pledge themselves to maintain the same uniform conduct which has ever distinguished them, and are ready to answer singly, at the bar of justice, to any charge *legally* brought against them, whenever it shall please their country to call upon them for their vindication, at the same time, *solemnly declaring that they will sooner yield their lives, than desert their principles!*

Such, at a time when it might naturally be expected that if there were any *secret* design, it would have been *immediately* promulgated, or if any *real Guilt* had existed, it would have shrunk for refuge beneath the veil of obscurity, were the *serious* and *solemn* resolutions of the London Corresponding Society. For there are times and occasions when even acrimony of language and intemperance of expression may be overlooked and forgiven, when men may be justly allowed the privilege of "*speaking Daggers*, if they *use* none," and be suffered to enjoy at least the solitary satisfaction of pouring forth their complaints and grievances, to receive consolation and to alleviate despair.

Had

Had the Prime Minister of England, once the supporter, but now the vindictive opposer of Parliamentary Reform, been truly the friend of his King and Country; or had we indeed enjoyed the blessings of a fair and equal representation, should we at this moment have been rashly plunged into all the horrors of an unjust and an unnecessary war; should we have seen without inquiry, and almost without concern, our manufacturers starved, our commerce ruined, and our countrymen slaughtered; or should we have quietly permitted *four and twenty Millions more* of our national wealth, to be wrung from the hard hand of honest industry, (*six* of which are to be sent out of the country) without *even the formality of paying a compliment to an accommodating House of Commons?* But what can be expected from a Minister so versatile and so capricious, who can provide continual armaments without going to war, and commence war, without a sufficient armament; from a cabinet council, of whom, it has been well observed, that every member is, or professes to be, a lawyer, one only excepted, the Lord Chancellor; and from an administration so impotent and unpropitious, that like old women at a game of whist they find it necessary to *change places* for better luck?

In

In this slumbering age of cautious prudence, when men by some unaccountable fatality, seem universally agreed to lose at once their recollection and their senses, to barter their integrity, and forsake their principles; when public spirit is treated as a chimera, and remonstrance deemed rebellion; when a listless torpor and a languid indifference pervade the public mind, and nought remains save silence and despair; the friends of Reform may perhaps, by some be accused of being too violent and intemperate in their proceedings, of having in some degree deviated from the strict line of prudence, and transgressed the boundaries of discretion; but when the atmosphere becomes highly charged with pestilential vapours, and the sandy desert parched with extreme heat, does it not require the rushing torrent and the sweeping whirlwind to yield refreshing moisture, and purify the air!

Who is here so vile that does not love his country? or who so base as not to value freedom? to him indeed Reform is ill-timed and dangerous, since to such a man corruption is honourable, and slavery a virtue: but if the principle of the former be inherent in every bosom, and the latter engraven on every heart, let me conjure my fellow citizens by that love and value they profess—by
that

that constitution they venerate, and that freedom they adore, directly to avow their sentiments and prove their sincerity, by uniting and endeavouring to recover their *lost* liberties, and redress their country's wrongs !

We have, this evening been threatened, in the most gloomy terms with the horrors of an invasion, and asked what would be the sentiments and conduct of every Englishman upon so alarming an occasion ; permit me, Sir, to assure the gentleman, that he is but ill-acquainted with the real sentiments of the people of this country, if he suppose that it would be a subject of joy or congratulation. I believe, Sir, we are still *English* enough, to wish to Reform *our own* laws and redress *our own* grievances, without foreign interference ; and for my own part, I declare that I dread an invasion of *any* kind, whether it be of French soldiers, or of Hessian mercenaries, and profess an equal detestation of French Emigrants, and German Princes !

We are indeed, at this awful moment, upon the verge of a deep and dreadful precipice ! To advance will be fatal, to retreat is almost impracticable ! what will be the final result, or where the termination, it is impossible to calculate or foresee.

At

At such a fearful time does not every principle of policy and prudence call aloud for the adoption of measures, calculated to procure unanimity and preserve affection? There have not been wanting men of property and respectability, who have declared it their opinion, that it is now too late for Reform, and that the country is inevitably lost! if so, then farewell to every pleasing prospect, and to every consolatory reflection! all hope is at once obliterated and extinguished, the wild predictions of modern prophecy may soon be fulfilled, the empty boastings of our enemies realized, *the banks of the Thames may be assailed, and modern Carthage destroyed!* If the last hour of the political existence of this country is indeed drawing near, and we are to be involved in one general and universal ruin, *let us, if but for a moment be free;* restore to us our rights and privileges, and redress our grievances, we will then *stand or fall together,* and fight for the Constitution, so long as the Constitution continues to be worth fighting for!

But we are told also, by the same gentleman, that the Gallic fleet is now riding triumphant, and bidding us defiance, even in our own channel. It is too true—thanks to the prudence and foresight of a wise and vigilant administration. Instead of consulting how to repel our foreign enemies,

F

Ministers

Ministers have been studiously endeavouring to disunite the people at home. Instead of being engaged with the board of Admiralty, they have been closeted with their confidential friends and companions, the spies and informers, to harraß and perplex the popular societies, and persecute those individuals, who believing *them* sincere, have only propagated *their* opinions, and followed *their* instructions! But, what encouragement is there for any man of merit, to exert or distinguish himself for the benefit of his country, when we see the glorious first of June placed upon a level with the bombardment of Corsica, and the titled honour which was intended to decorate the bosom of a brave and gallant Admiral, meanly wrested from him to give to an unprincipled apostate!

Why were those, who by a moderate and peaceful Reform, fought only to alleviate the miseries of mankind, and promote the general happiness, so harshly and so ungenerously treated? They were of all others, the men who least deserved this ungrateful return; compared with those who have deserted and betrayed the public interest to bask in the warm sunshine of a court, and enjoy the genial influence of royal favour; they were, as the angels of light to the fiends of Pandemonium. Their generous ardour, their unshaken
attachment,

attachment, their incorruptible integrity, and their undaunted courage, have at length extorted approbation even from their enemies, and called forth the tear of condolance from many an unwilling eye! Yes, gallant Band of Patriots, your country loudly hails you, as pre-eminently chosen from amongst her favourite sons, to stand forth the guardians of her sacred rights, and save her from destruction; conscious of your innocence in the warm impulse of honest zeal, I told you some months ago, that they should not hurt a single hair of your heads. The words were rash, they were perhaps intemperate; but behold! My prediction has been fully verified, and your triumph is complete. An honest and an enlightened jury, has honourably and unanimously acquitted you at the bar of your country, and their names and their verdict, together with the history of your persecutions, shall be enrolled in the Register of Fame, and descend with undiminished splendor to the latest posterity!

From a careful and attentive examination of the proceedings on the late prosecutions for High Treason, I am unwillingly led to this serious and settled opinion; that there *was* a conspiracy; a dark, a daring, and a detestable conspiracy; a *conspiracy against the liberties of the people!* Thanks,

however, to the enlightened spirit of the nation ; it has been detected and defeated ! *The people has proved triumphant*, and Reform is *now* prosecuted with tenfold energy ! It will be vain to attempt much longer to silence the voice of reason, or impede the progress of enquiry. As the strong nitrous acid, when poured on the surface of metallic bodies, penetrates into their substance and forms an indelible impression, so has the glorious cause of Reformation so firmly established itself within the human mind, that not all the persecutions of Ministers, the pikes and bayonets of tyrants—the combination of courts, or the coalition of Princes, can ever eradicate its principles or stop its progress through the universe !

Already do the united energies of truth and reason, begin to prevail over the artful delusions of sophistry and falsehood. Already does influence seek for shelter among its own servile dependants, and corruption retire to its inmost citadel. But the battering-ram is preparing, and the strong engines are ready to demolish the remaining outworks, and assail the weakened fortress. Soon will the formidable attack be made, and, like the walls of Jericho, when the last charge is sounded, the whole fabric, with a loud and fearful crash, shall tumble to the ground !

Then

Then let the guilty Minister of the day beware! Let him not continue to worship his Dagon, the God of his idolatry, nor longer remain in his temple of corruption, lest, like another Samson, while he become accessary to its fall, he be buried beneath its ruins!

And thou, apostate hypocrite! W—— P——, to thee I call, and with a friendly voice, to warn thee of thy impending danger, and rouse thee from thy fatal security! Hear me while briefly I unfold my purpose, and may the sentiments I utter, while they excite thy attention, sink deep into thy guilty bosom!

That portion of the divine energy, which in the infancy, and afterwards in the decline of the Roman Empire, to save its liberties, assailed a Tarquin and a Cæsar, is now risen, and stalks abroad to perform its mighty mission: in one hand it bears the peaceful olive-branch, in the other a flaming sword. It is *yet* in thy power to take thy choice and save a sinking state; defer not a moment, I charge thee, lest it be too late; listen to the warning voice of that secret Monitor, which tells thee that the awful day of retribution fast approaches, and that if thou comply not with its requisition,

requisition, " *it will surely meet thee at Philippi!*"

The public voice is now awake, it calls for Reformation. Attend to its admonitions or dread its vengeance! There is a point, beyond which human endurance is no longer safe or practicable; when confidence is withdrawn, inquiry should begin; and remember that when patience is quite exhausted, submission will be at an end.

I call upon thee to acquit thyself of the serious charge of being the Prime Mover and instigator of the massacres of Paris, Toulon, and la Vendee, of planning the convention of Pilnitz, and encouraging the manifestoes of the Duke of Brunswick! I accuse thee of having by thy perfidy and dissimulation, lessened the zeal of our friends and encreased the number of our enemies; and I present to thy affrighted imagination, the venerable Constitution of England, mangled and mutilated like Cæsar's bloody mantle, and like him receiving its death-blow from the hands of its adopted favourite!

Thy situation hourly becomes more critical, yet who will now *condescend* to pity or reprove thee?

thee? Thy friends thou hast treated with contempt, thine enemies with persecution. The advice of the former thou hast believed, yet neglected; the threats of the latter thou hast derided, yet feared! The Majesty of the public thou hast insulted and vilified, the people of England thou hast bought and sold! thine Administration exhibits a system of swindling, thy conduct, a labyrinth of deceit!

Why declaim against infidelity, yet wage war with eternal justice? Wherefore boast of penetration, yet not perceive that France is invincible! In vain have armed legions, and foreign mercenaries, assailed her frontiers; in vain have treachery and corruption urged their united force! The principles of resistance have always afforded the means of preservation, and France, though opposed by a world in arms, will still continue to baffle its mighty efforts, and shall never bend to the galling yoke of tyranny, nor become again the land of oppression!

Recal then our scattered forces—dissolve this incongruous, this *uncombined* confederacy—acknowledge the right of a great and potent nation, to legislate for itself—give peace to this affrighted kingdom

kingdom—redress its grievances—promote Reform—desist from persecution—and confess at once, that the VOICE OF A PEOPLE IS THE VOICE OF GOD!



It was almost unanimously decided that the Friends of Reform were the true Friends of their King and Country.



THE END.

